

# Module 4: The Practice of Meaningful Engagement: Checking-in & Connecting with Families in Supervised Visitation Programs

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## Module 4, Segment 1: Purpose of a Meaningful Check-in



### Facilitator Preparation & Notes

*This segment is meant to help you and your staff explore the practice of conducting regular and ongoing check-ins with every person using center services. **This segment is intended to support programs which currently do NOT engage in a formalized practice of checking-in with every person using their center services.** If your center currently engages in a formal check-in process with EVERY person using center services, please skip to Module 1, Segment 7: Enhancing the Practice of Meaningful Check-ins.*

*Please note: Inspire Action for Social Change has created another training package specific to working with infants, children, and youth in supervised visitation, in this training package you will find a training segment, “Meaningfully Engaging with Children and Youth at Our Center” (Module 1, segment 6) which contains the information provided in this module as it relates to checking in with children, but also contains a process for integrating feedback and lessons learned from young people into your programming model. Please contact Inspire Action for Social Change if you are interested in further information on creating a process for integrating feedback into your programming model.*

*([www.inspireactionforsocialchange.org](http://www.inspireactionforsocialchange.org))*



### Supporting Materials

- Each staff person will need writing materials and their Supplemental Workbook
- Note-taking materials



### Facilitator Guide & Talking Points

1. (5 minutes) Check-in: Self-reflection writing. In your workbook on page 35 respond to the following question: “Think of a time you went to a program or a function. Share two ways you felt welcomed and two specific ways you felt uncomfortable or not welcomed.”
2. (5 minutes) Bring the staff back into the large group and ask if anyone would like to share highlights from their writing reflection. After this initial share back, ask the staff how they could incorporate this reflection into your center practice.
3. (15 minutes) Large group discussion. Share with the staff that while conducting orientations is our first opportunity to lay the groundwork for building trust and establishing a relationship with every person using our center services, it is important to incorporate other intentional and ongoing opportunities to stay connected to every person using center services. One of the promising practices in the field of supervised visitation work is establishing the practice of check-ins, which is an **intentional** time to talk (check-in) with **EVERY** person who uses center services. Check-ins provide a space for every person using center services to engage with staff and have intentional time with staff that isn’t rushed or would require extra steps to set-up or be requested.

Ask staff to brainstorm possible outcomes of conducting a check-in practice. Be sure to take notes during this discussion so you can refer back to this discussion in future training segments. To

supplement your discussion if needed: Check-ins allow programs to:

- a. Establish and maintain an ongoing dialogue, learn about changing conditions and circumstances, and address ongoing and often changing safety needs.
  - b. Build meaningful relationships with parents and children.
  - c. Increase an understanding of the unique and changing needs of families.
  - d. Have the ability to conduct meaningful visitation safety planning and account for ever-changing risk.
  - e. Have an opportunity to plant seeds of change and interrupt current and future violence.
  - f. Support a healing centered engagement model in a supervised visitation program.
  - g. Build trust with every member of every family using center services.
  - h. Establish an intentional time to learn about changing risks, changing needs, and any changing safety concerns.
  - i. Work with people who use violence to create meaningful, compassionate accountability to prevent future violence.
  - j. The ability to make adaptations in individual visitation plans and service delivery, if needed.
  - k. Support staff coming together to recognize and assess programmatic gaps, needs, enhancements, or changes that need to be addressed.
4. (15 minutes) Important: Ensure that you take notes of this discussion, you will want to revisit the ideas the staff discussed when you move to Segment 6: How to Operationalize & Implement the Practice of Check-ins with Each Center Participant. Engage the staff in a discussion using the following questions:
- a. Is there a reason why we have not engaged in the practice of check-ins?
  - b. Are there barriers for our center conducting check-ins with every person using center services?

- c. How could we establish a check-in process that is in line with the purpose of conducting check-in that we just explored?
- 5. (10 minutes) Next steps: Establish a staff agreement about your commitment to establish a formalized check-in process, review what your team established as the purpose of a formalized check-in process, and discuss the barriers you identified.
- 6. (5 minutes) Check-out: Ask each person to share, “What is one thing you hope to learn how to do (personally or professionally)?”

## **Module 4, Segment 2: The Practice of Check-ins: Creating an ongoing practice of connecting with and supporting families**



### **Facilitator Preparation & Notes**

This segment is meant to build staff and organizational interest and commitment around the practice of check-ins with adults, youth, and children utilizing your services. Because supervised visitation centers are generally quite busy and staff may feel they already have plenty to do, this segment helps them explore the benefits of check-ins and the value of an authentic connection between staff and center participants. Asking them to think about where, when, and how they feel the most connected to others sets a framework to think about building trust and rapport with families. This segment also includes quotes from participants from OVW funded supervised visitation centers to help set the stage for developing a regular check-in practice.



### **Supporting Materials**

- Supplemental Workbook
- Pens, crayons, or colored pencils



### **Facilitator Guide & Talking Points**

1. (5 minutes) Check-in: Self-reflection writing. In your workbook on page 36 respond to the following question: “What makes you feel most connected to others?”
2. (5 minutes) Ask for volunteers to share some points from the writing exercise.
3. (5 minutes) Ask the staff to break into pairs and discuss: Why is it important to build strong, connected relationships with each child and each parent who utilizes your center?
4. (5 minutes) Ask staff to turn to page 37 of their workbooks, and color in the following quote from Brene Brown at Courageworks,

*“Connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment.”* Ask them to consider the quote as they color or doodle on this workbook page.

5. (5 minutes) Ask staff: how does this quote apply to the work you do here at our center?

6. (5 minutes) Ask staff to turn to page 38 of the workbook and read two quotes from survivors from the *OVW Supervised Visitation Grant Program National Evaluation and complete the workbook prompts*. Offer the option that they can write about how they would like to nurture this type of connection on their workbook page.

*“I love the staff! They are so caring. They can just look at me and tell if I had a bad day - they take that extra 30 seconds to ask how are you doing, how do you feel, how did this visit go? They definitely make me feel comfortable!”* -Quote from a survivor using a supervised visitation program.

*“Something I like is that [center staff] take my daughter to the visits, and they talk to me a little and ask me what’s going good, and what’s going bad and they give me resources; they help me or they tell me you can go here, you can do this.”* -Quote from a survivor using a supervised visitation program.

7. (5 minutes) Ask for a few volunteers to share thoughts from their writing exercise. Close the discussion by letting staff know that in future meetings, you will be discussing how you can integrate check-ins with everyone who uses services at the center.
8. (3 minutes) Homework assignment: Before the next training, ask each person to read and reflect on workbook page 39, which provides some key strategies a visitation center should consider when working with a parent who needs protection.
9. (5 minutes) Check-out: For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

## Module 4, Segment 3: Checking-in and Connecting with Survivors of Domestic Violence



### Facilitator Preparation & Notes

*In the previous segment, each staff member was asked to complete a homework assignment. Remind the staff to make sure they have completed that assignment in advance of conducting this training segment. In this segment, the staff will be asked to generate ideas on post-it notes for two different concepts, “considerations for the parent needing protection when they are the custodial parent” and “considerations for the parent needing protection when they are the visiting parent.” You will want to save these notes, so in advance, you should designate and label an area on the wall or use flipchart paper to collect them.*



### Supporting Materials

- Each staff person will need writing materials and their Supplemental Workbook (with completed homework assignments)
- Post-it notes
- Flipchart paper or a spot on the wall to collect all the post-it notes



### Facilitator Guide & Talking Points

1. (10 minutes) Check-in: Share any thoughts or observations you relate to the practice of regular check-ins with all family members since our last meeting.
2. (3 minutes) Share with everyone: Today, we are talking about connecting with the parent needing protection, remembering that they could be the visiting parent or the custodial parent. Creating regular and ongoing opportunities to connect with parents needing protection has been established as a key strategy in the field of

supervised visitation to support safety. Learning from adult survivors of violence and building a trusting relationship needs to be an ongoing process. While orientations are our first opportunity to lay the groundwork for building trust, it is important to incorporate intentional and ongoing opportunities to stay connected. Check-ins would allow us to establish and maintain an ongoing dialogue with survivors, learn about any changing conditions or circumstances, and address ongoing and often changing safety needs. We also want to ensure we are checking our assumptions and remember that the person needing protection can be either the custodial or noncustodial parent and be of any gender and sexual orientation, and their ex-partner can be any gender and sexual orientation.

3. (5 minutes) Large group discussion: When you think about checking-in with the adult survivor of violence / parent needing protection, what first comes to mind? Let them know they don't need to censor their thoughts and feelings.
4. (10 minutes) Ask the staff to take out their homework assignment from workbook page 39 and share their reflections and thoughts about the key strategies for supporting safety for adult survivors using a supervised visitation program. The key strategies introduced in the homework assignment for supporting safety for adult survivors using a supervised visitation program are as follows:
  - Create an environment that interrupts and intervenes in power and control and abuse tactics, minimizes risk, and works to reduce opportunities for ongoing violence, which includes ensuring we aren't inadvertently colluding with abusive behaviors.
  - Be flexible and open to safety strategies that will change over time.
  - Be informed and knowledgeable about the dynamics of domestic violence so you can identify red flags and risk.
  - Allow space for the complex feelings that adult survivors may have about the other parent.
  - Let each survivor's experience of domestic violence inform



your tailored response and their safety/visitation plan; as they are the experts in their own lives.

5. (10 minutes) Share with the staff that we want to build on these key strategies and now generate considerations for checking-in with adult survivors. Let the staff know that their ideas will be saved to potentially shape the development of your center's check-in practice. Hand out a stack of post-it notes to each person. Ask them to think about what needs to be considered to conduct a regular check-in with the parent needing protection **when they are the residential parent**. They will write each consideration on one post-it note, which will be shared with the whole group. Below are possible themes they can explore, and ask them to get as specific as possible with considerations under these themes - you may find it helpful to print these themes and hang them up in the room as you facilitate your discussion:
  - a. Safety
  - b. Confidentiality
  - c. Anxiety, fear, hesitation of the parent needing protection
  - d. The parent-child relationship
  - e. The parenting style of the person needing protection
  - f. Routines, rituals, and values important to the family
  - g. Building trust with center staff
  - h. Their feelings and thoughts around their children in this experience
  - i. The parenting style of the parent who used violence
  - j. Culture, traditions, and community
6. (10 minutes) Ask everyone to read their considerations aloud as they add them to the correct place on the wall or poster.
7. (10 minutes) Hand out another stack of post-it notes to each person. Ask them now to think about what needs to be considered to conduct a regular check-in with the parent needing protection **when they are the visiting parent**. They will write each consideration on one post-it note, which will be shared with the whole group. Below are possible themes they can explore, and ask

them to get as specific as possible with considerations under these themes - you may find it helpful to print these themes and hang them up in the room as you facilitate your discussion:

- a. Safety
  - b. Confidentiality
  - c. Anxiety, fear, or hesitation of the parent needing protection
  - d. The parent-child relationship
  - e. The parenting style of the person needing protection
  - f. Routines, rituals, and values important to the family
  - g. Building trust with center staff
  - h. Their feelings and thoughts around their children during this time in their lives
  - i. The parenting style of the parent who used violence
  - j. Loss and overwhelming feelings related to not having custody of their children
  - k. Culture, traditions, and community
8. (10 minutes) Ask everyone to read their considerations aloud as they add their post-it notes to the correct place on the wall or poster.
  9. (5 minutes) Thank everyone for their participation, and let them know that in your next meeting, you will be exploring considerations for check-ins with the parent who uses violence. Ask if they have any questions.
  10. (3 minutes) Homework assignment: Before the next training ask each person to read and reflect on workbook pages 40-41 which provides some key strategies a visitation center should consider when working with a parent who has caused harm - which is the topic of the next training segment.
  11. (10 minutes) Share a hope you have for adult survivors of violence that might result from conducting regular check-ins at our center.

## Module 4, Segment 4: Checking-in and Connecting with the Person Who has Caused Harm



### Facilitator Preparation & Notes

*In the previous segment, each staff member was asked to complete a homework assignment. Remind the staff to make sure they have completed that assignment in advance of conducting this training segment. For this segment, the staff will be asked to generate ideas on post-it notes for two different concepts. You will want to save these post-it notes, so in advance, you should designate and label an area on the wall, or have flipchart paper to collect them.*



### Supporting Materials

- Each staff person will need writing materials and their Supplemental Workbook (with completed homework assignment)
- Post-it notes
- Open wall space or flipchart paper and spot to collect the post-it notes



### Facilitator Guide & Talking Points

1. (5 minutes) Check-in: Ask everyone to share their response to the following question: If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
2. (5 minutes) Large group discussion: When you think about checking in with the parent who uses violence, what first comes to mind? Let staff know they should try not to censor their thoughts and feelings.
3. (3 minutes) Share with staff: In our last meeting, we explored considerations related to regular check-ins with adult survivors of domestic violence. Today we are exploring considerations for regular check-ins with the person who uses violence. This is equally

important and a critical way to promote safety and well-being for everyone in the family. Checking-in with the person who uses violence may feel different or more difficult to some of us than checking-in with the adult survivor. Those feelings are okay; what's important is that everyone feels comfortable building trust with people who use violence who access our services. Change and healing happen in the context of trusted relationships. To develop compassionate accountability with people who use violence, some level of trust must be established. Check-ins are a step on that path. It's also important to remember that the person who uses violence can have the status of custodial or non-custodial parent and be any gender, and their ex-partner can be any gender. There are specific considerations for fatherhood, masculinity, and men who use violence in relationships. There are also specific considerations for LGBTQIA people who use violence in relationships, and we may need additional training on this issue. We have supplemental materials specifically for engaging in check-ins with fathers who use violence but want to note that others struggle with violence in relationships as well.

4. (10 minutes) Ask the staff to take out their homework assignment on pages 40-41 of their workbook and share their reflections and thoughts about the key strategies when working with a parent who has caused harm at a visitation center.

The key strategies from the workbook are:

**Humanity as a leading approach.**

Treating all people who use violence with respect, dignity, and fairness will help to reduce their anxiety and potentially minimize their hostility toward their partner. While it is important to never lose sight of the harm caused by people who use violence, seeing them as a whole person can help us build respectful, non-colluding relationships. Moving away from labeling people by their behavior (abuser) or their custodial status (visiting parent) makes it easier to engage the whole person. When staff genuinely care about the person who has caused harm, the person feels respected and are

more willing to engage with the staff and more likely to make changes to their behavior.

**Allow for imperfection.**

There are often many unrealistic expectations for people who use violence in supervised visitation programs. If they have not completely changed or are not holding themselves fully accountable for the harm they have caused, program staff often dismiss incremental change. There is great value in honoring and acknowledging when something good happens. When you support and encourage strengths, you will be more effective in addressing issues or problems. Acknowledging even the slightest change can be a motivator for further and ongoing changes.

**Build strong non-colluding relationships.**

Building relationships with people who use violence is the foundation of this work. If supervised visitation center staff do not build authentic, respectful, non-colluding relationships, the rest of our efforts will fail. It is important to show up with a genuine curiosity and allow people who use violence the space to share their story. Listening without judgment can be transformative for everyone. This does not mean being permissive of abusive behavior. We are suggesting that to create opportunities for change and hold people responsible for their abusive actions, it is also important to build a genuine connection.

**Be transparent.**

Transparency is critical to our work, and a cornerstone of trauma-informed care. Taking the mystery out of supervised visitation services while being clear, direct, and open can help minimize some of the anxiety and frustration, parents may feel when using center services. We are not suggesting that transparency will eliminate all the challenges you face as visitation providers; however, it will help reduce some of the issues that typically arise. Transparency is also

foundational to eliminating punitive approaches. Punitive policies and practices are those that are arbitrary and usually grounded in subjective values. They often punish for the sake of punishing, without supporting the person even to recognize the potential for healing and growth. When organizations are transparent about why and how each policy exists, both with themselves and the families they serve, punitive policies are more likely to be avoided. A move towards transparency will support you to identify policies and practices that should be amended or eliminated.

**Use fatherhood ideals and values.**

When the person who caused harm is also the father, leading with nurturing, warm, and responsible values around fatherhood is an important strategy for engaging with men. This approach can invite a father to shift his focus to the well-being of his children which can ultimately increase safety for everyone in the family. Leading with positive fatherhood principles, and learning about his values as a dad, can help you better understand how he sees himself as a parent. By focusing on the type of father he wants to be to his children, you are demonstrating that you see his potential as a positive force in the lives of his children. Men who use violence may not have had positive, nurturing experiences with their fathers, and may need support to see themselves differently. Additionally, a growing body of evidence shows that a “two-generation”<sup>4</sup> approach to healing and recovery can prevent future violence while improving resiliency for both the father and his children. When fathers who have caused harm and their children can heal and grow in safe, connected contact with each other (like in supervised visitation), significant change can happen.

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<sup>4</sup> Blue Shield of California Foundation, “Breaking the Cycle: A life Course Framework for Preventing Domestic Violence” (2019).

5. (10 minutes) Share with the staff that you will be asking them to generate considerations for checking-in with parents who use violence, and that their ideas will be saved to potentially shape the development of your center's check-in practice. Hand out a stack of post-it notes to each person. Ask them to think about what needs to be considered when conducting a check-in with the parent who uses violence **when they are the custodial parent**. They will write each consideration on one post-it note, which will be shared with the whole group. Below are possible themes they can explore, and ask them to get as specific as possible with considerations under these themes:
  - a. Safety of the adult and child survivor
  - b. Confidentiality
  - c. Anxiety, fear, or hesitation that the parent who uses violence may be feeling
  - d. The parent-child relationship
  - e. The parenting style of the person who uses violence
  - f. Routines, rituals, and values important to the family
  - g. Building trust with center staff
  - h. Their feelings and thoughts around their children during this time in their lives
  - i. The parenting style of the other parent
  - j. Culture, traditions, and community
  - k. How their ideas about gender shape their way of being in intimate relationships
6. (10 minutes) Ask everyone to read their considerations aloud as they add them to the correct place on the wall or flipchart.
7. (10 minutes) Hand out another stack of post-it notes to each person. Ask them to now think about what needs to be considered **when** conducting regular check-ins **with the parent who uses violence when they are the visiting parent**. They will write each individual consideration on one post-it note, which will be shared with the whole group. Below are possible themes they can explore,

and ask them to get as specific as possible with considerations under these themes:

- a. Safety of the adult and child survivor
  - b. Confidentiality
  - c. Anxiety, fear, hesitation that the parent who uses violence may be feeling
  - d. The parent-child relationship
  - e. The parenting style of the person who uses violence
  - f. Routines, rituals, and values important to the family
  - g. Building trust with center staff
  - h. Their feelings and thoughts around their children during this time in their lives
  - i. The parenting style of the other parent
  - j. Culture, traditions, and community
  - k. How their ideas about gender shape their way of being in intimate relationships
8. (10 minutes) Ask everyone to read their considerations aloud as they add them to the correct place on the wall or flipchart paper.
  9. (5 minutes) Thank everyone for their participation, and let them know that in your next meeting, you will be exploring considerations for check-ins with infants, children, and youth. Ask if they have any questions.
  10. (5 minutes) Check-out: Share one hope you have for parents who use violence that might result from conducting regular check-ins at our center.



## Module 4, Segment 5: Checking-in and Connecting with Infants, Children, and Youth



### Facilitator Preparation & Notes

*Supporting children and youth using your visitation programs is another important part of supporting the needs and safety of each member of the family. It can be easy for young people to get lost in the shuffle of their parents' needs, issues, and concerns. It is important for visitation programs to dedicate time to getting to know the young people coming to their centers, to carve out time for regular and ongoing check-ins as well as incorporating their unique needs, experiences, and wishes into your overall work with each family. Talking with and connecting with young people requires time and attention to do it with intention and care. We have provided an additional supplemental guide: "Considerations to Guide Check-ins with Children and Youth" which is found at the end of this module. This supplemental guide is provided to support your team to build a more complex understanding of working with children as it relates to the practice of checking-in. Inspire Action for Social Change also provides a specialized in-depth training dedicated to working with infants, children, and youth in a supervised visitation center which goes beyond the practice of conducting check-ins with young people. If you are interested in this training, please contact Inspire Action for Social Change at [info@inspireactionforsocialchange.org](mailto:info@inspireactionforsocialchange.org).*



### Supporting Materials

- Each staff person will need writing materials and their Supplemental Workbook
- Post-it notes
- Open wall space or flipchart paper to collect the post-it notes



## **Facilitator Guide & Talking Points**

1. (5 minutes) Check-in: What do you look forward to in your work with infants, children, and youth at our center?
2. (5 minutes) Share with staff: “Much like our work with parents, creating opportunities to help bring infants, children, and youth into our programs is essential. Children and youth benefit from having orientations and regular check-ins with staff. We must recognize that each child will have different needs based on age, development, comfort, and level of trauma. It is important to ensure that the opportunity for children to talk with staff at our center exists. Helping children and youth know what to expect can help reduce anxiety and stress they may be experiencing. An important component of engaging with children and youth is working with both of their parents to determine how best to support their children. Helping the parent who needs protection to prepare children for visits and support them after visits, and creating alternative opportunities to garner support and resources to take care of themselves, are all important components that visitation center staff can offer. Additionally, working with the parent who uses violence around the needs of their children can help make visits that, at the very least, cause no further harm and at best promote healing and change. It is important for us to remember that our role is not to make visits happen. Our role is to ensure that if visits happen, adult and child survivors feel physically and emotionally safe. This allows you to slow down, listen to children, and take their lead.”
3. (10 minutes) Large group discussion:
  - Has anyone ever conducted regular check-ins with young people at the center?
  - If so, what was the process like, how did it go?
  - What are the challenges with conducting a check-in with children coming to our center?
4. (15 minutes) Break staff into groups of three and provide each

group with post-it notes. Ask each group to have a small group discussion, generating ideas about check-ins with young people. There are four questions they should discuss on workbook pages 42-43. After each question, ask that their group collect their best ideas to bring forth to the large group discussion. They should write their ideas on the post-it note pages you have provided, one idea per post-it note. The questions are as follows:

### **Small-Group Discussion Questions**

1. What do young people need from a check-in process with center staff? What are your initial thoughts and ideas?
2. What should be the goals of conducting check-ins with young people at our center? What are your initial thoughts and ideas?
3. How can the confidentiality of young people be respected at our center? What are your initial thoughts and ideas?
4. Logistically, how can our center support a check-in process with every child using center services? Think about when, where, and how this practice can happen at our center. What are your initial thoughts and ideas?
5. (15 minutes) Bring staff back into the large group and ask them to share their ideas as they post them to the post-it collection area you established. You will want to save this important information when you move to the training Segment 6: How to Operationalize & Implement the Practice of Check-ins with Each Center Participant.
6. (5 minutes) Check-out: If you were given a crystal ball and could ask one question about your life, what would you want to know?

## **Supplemental Guide for Module 4, Segment 5: Checking-in and Connecting with Infants, Children, and Youth**

### **Considerations to Guide Check-in's with Children and Youth**

Here are some leading principles that can help you establish your practice of checking in with young people at your center.

#### ***Let children and youth lead.***

Centers should give children and youth some ability to guide their process. We often make assumptions about what children and youth need and want. We try to protect them from sensitive conversations; we strive to ensure that, on our watch, nothing bad happens.

Sometimes children want to ask their parent hard questions, tell them how they feel, express their emotions or confront them about the harm they have caused. Centers can support children and youth by fostering a space that allows those conversations to happen.

Understand that young people may test the waters at a visitation center to determine if the environment is truly safe and if they can trust staff and the abusive parent. Gaining their trust will take time. Following their lead, giving them the tools to ask for what they need and then following through on what you've discussed, will have a positive impact on the children and youth coming to your programs.

#### ***Give attention to transitions, routine, and predictability.***

Check-in with children and youth before and after their visits. This can also establish a predictable routine, which is healing and beneficial for trauma survivors.

Centers should be intentional about creating a safe space for children and youth to visit with their parent. Paying attention to transitions and maintaining a predictable routine is important. Staff can support children and youth through the many transitions that occur at centers. This requires carving out intentional time before and after visits for children to check-in with center staff and move at their own pace. Often children are moved quickly from one parent to the next, and

sometimes they need time to transition. When you have multiple children from one family, recognize that each child may have different needs.

Predictability is important – if something is going to change, do your best to inform children before it happens. For example, center staff can tell children “Next week your monitor is going to be on vacation. Would you like to meet the person who will be with you and your dad next week?”.

***Be a positive, loving adult in a child’s life.***

Never underestimate the power you have to support the children and youth coming to your program. We know that one of the key resiliency factors for young people is to be in the presence of positive, loving relationships. Visitation center staff members can be one of those individuals in a young person’s life. Take time to get to know the children and youth coming to your program. Validate their experience, let them know it’s not their fault and they are not alone. Let them know you care about them and will be there to listen, provide support, and keep them safe if that is what they need.

**Be intentional about how you talk to children and youth.**

Young people often have a difficult time responding to directed questions and feel uneasy about one-on-one conversations. We have found that using an activity to facilitate directed conversation is often an effective approach when working with children and youth. Here are a few examples of what you could do:

(1) Ask them to create a drawing that describes something in particular. For example: “Can you draw a picture of what you like about visiting your mom or your dad at the visitation center?” or “Can you draw a picture of what bugs you about coming to the visitation center to see your mom or your dad?” Or, you can ask something more open-ended like, “Can you draw a picture of how it feels to visit your mom/dad at the visitation center?”

(2) Ask them to finish a sentence verbally or in writing for you. For example: “When I have come to see my mom/dad at the visitation center I am....”, or “When I’m at the visitation center I wish I could....”, or “I think the visitation center should....”. Or, “I would like to come to the visitation center more if....” If you sense a young person needs a less involved conversation, you can ask: “What is one word you would use to describe visiting your mom/dad here at the center?”

(3) Ask them if they would be willing to give some advice to other people who work in visitation centers or give some advice to help other kids coming to see their one of their parents at a visitation center. For example: “What would you want other kids to know about coming to a visitation center?”, “What is the best thing about coming to the visitation center to see your mom/dad?” or “What is hard about coming to a visitation center?”

**Special Note:** It is important to be clear with both the kids and their parents about the check-in process. When and where check-in will take place, why you are asking the questions you are asking, what you will do with the information you gather, the extent and limitations of confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of talking with you. Ensure that every kid knows that they can stop talking to you at any time, and they don’t have to share anything they don’t wish to share or answer.

Only engage in these activities and questions with children and youth during times when they are emotionally regulated and relatively calm, and only once you have established some rapport and relationship with them. You should also be aware that privacy is important when you conduct your check-ins with children and youth. Be intentional about whether other staff or siblings would be invited to be a part of the check-in process. Additionally, make sure you have a plan to communicate to their caregiver if they display any distress or emotional dysregulation, so their caregiver is aware and prepared to support them.

## **Module 4, Segment 6: How to Operationalize & Implement the Practice of Check-ins with Each Center Participant**



### **Facilitator Preparation & Notes**

Before this segment, you will want to make sure you have the notes that staff made in each of the previous segments (Segments 1-5). This allows you to draw on the expertise of staff while also demonstrating that their work in all of your staff meetings is building towards something larger. At the end of this segment, you will find a supplemental guide with sample check-in questions. You may discover in your exploration of the material in this segment that the staff team experiences a difficult time operationalizing what they would ask parents or how they would frame a check-in conversation. This supplemental guide is intended to support your staff exploration and help give specific ideas to staff.



### **Supporting Materials**

- Each staff person will need writing materials and their Supplemental Workbook
- Notes taken from your all of your previous group discussions held in Segments 1-5 (may be helpful to organize these or type up all the notes in one document)
- Note-taking materials



### **Facilitator Guide & Talking Points**

1. (5 minutes) Check-in: What do you love about your job, and what do you think you do well in your position?
2. (10 minutes) Bring out the notes from all of your previous discussions in Segments 1-5. Post all of the notes (or distribute a copy to each person if you typed all of the notes). Have each person review all of the notes to remind the team about their past

thinking related to conducting check-ins.

3. (5 minutes) Ask staff to break into pairs and discuss: Now that we have spent more time thinking about the practice of check-ins, how have your thoughts changed or evolved?
4. (5 minutes) Bring staff back for a large group discussion to share out from their pairs.
5. (5 minutes) Ask staff to brainstorm (make a list) of the barriers that they think could make a regular check-in practice with all members of each family challenging.
6. (10 minutes) Bring staff back for a larger group discussion to share from their lists. As you listen to the discussion, make a note of themes that emerge. You can supplement the conversation as needed with these barriers identified by other centers:
  - Scheduling practices: Often, staff feel constrained by tight schedules.
  - Space: Often the center design hasn't been organized to support a dedicated space for checking-in privately with each member of a family using center services.
  - The comfort of staff: Some of the staff may not feel equipped to handle difficult conversations that might arise during a check-in.
  - Policies and procedures: Often, there aren't formalized policies and procedures in place to support the practice.
  - Documentation: Many staff express worries related to the conundrum of what needs to be documented as a result of a check-in.
  - Difficult or challenging participants: Staff can feel hesitant to engage with center participants they feel are difficult to approach, those who often complain about the other parent, or aggressively protest the system or perceived injustices.
7. (10 minutes): Break staff into pairs and ask them to discuss how they feel about conducting regular check-ins now that they have shared the barriers.
8. (10 minutes) Bring the staff back for a large group discussion. While



they are talking, identify the themes you hear from their brainstorming. Present the top 1-3 barriers that emerged as a theme (choose based on the level of repetition and what you perceive to be significant barriers) and seek consensus. If there is no consensus, work with staff to identify their top 1-3 barriers. Then ask the staff what ideas they have to remove each of the identified barriers. This may be the beginning of a larger discussion and process, or you may be able to identify solutions immediately. If you believe more time and attention needs to be devoted to identifying solutions to these barriers, move to step 9. If you have identified immediate solutions to attempt to remove barriers, skip the next step.

9. (5 minutes) If more time is needed to problem solve through these barriers, ask for a small group of volunteers to meet to identify possible solutions. Ask them to identify a time to meet next, and let everyone know that once they have developed a set of draft solutions, they will be presented to the whole group for discussion and consensus. Make sure you track this and include time in a future staff meeting to hear back from the smaller workgroup.
10. (35 minutes) Practice session: Ask the staff to review the Supplemental Guide for this module “Sample Check-in Questions” and highlight two-three questions that they think they would like to practice using - encourage each person to choose at least one question that they would struggle to use during a check-in. Create teams of three people. In their teams, they will practice conducting a check-in. One person will start in the role as the staff person conducting a check-in, one person will act as the center participant, and the third person will observe. The team will rotate roles every 10 minutes, allowing the person who is conducting the check-in five minutes to practice and five minutes to receive feedback. Note to facilitator: Prior to the teams breaking into their practice sessions, remind the staff of the work you completed in Module 3, Segment 4: Peer-to-Peer Support & Giving Feedback and also ask each person to refer back to the workbook pages on “Tenets to Peer-to-Peer

Connection and Feedback Reminders” and “Providing Peer-to-Peer Support” found on pages 29-30 of their workbook.

11. (10 minutes) Return to the large group and discuss how each of the practice sessions went. Ask each team to report back any takeaways, observations, useful tips, and helpful feedback they would like to share with the full staff team. Encourage staff to continue to practice with one another outside of the staff meetings as much as possible.
12. (5 minutes) Check out: What do you value most in a friendship?

## **Supplemental Guide for Module 4, Segment 6: How to Operationalize & Implement the Practice of Check-ins with Each Center Participant**

### **Sample Check-in Questions\***

\*Important note: A list of questions can create a temptation for many programs to create a form for staff to complete related to check-ins. We recommend that the check-in process NOT be guided by a form. This can make the process feel needlessly formal, institutional, distant, and inauthentic. Remember that check-ins should be relational and connective. If necessary, refer back to Segment 1: The Purpose of a Meaningful Check-in and reflect on the brainstorming staff discussion you held. These sample check-in questions are intended to demonstrate the myriad of ways you can begin your conversations with the adults who are using your center services.

- Is there anything we need to know since the last visit?
- Is there anything we need to know since we last connected?
- How do you feel the last visit went?
- What was one thing you thought was positive in the last visit?
- What was one thing that was tough or you have been considering?
- What is something you want to do differently the next time you are with your child?
- Is there anything I can do to support you in this process?
- What would you like to do at today's visit?
- What could we do to make the visit the best it can be?
- Do you have any questions?
- Have there been any events or concerns you would like us to know about that occurred before this visit? After the last visit? In between visits?
- How are things going for you?
- How are things going for you as a result of the visitation/exchange services?

- How do you think things are going for your children as a result of visits?
- What have we done that has been most helpful to you?
- What has caused concern for you?
- What else can we do to help you and your children?
- Have there been any events or concerns related to your safety that you would like us to know?
- In your opinion, how are things going for your children as a result of the visits?
- How is everything else going for you? Are there any challenges or issues you would like us to know about?

## Module 4, Segment 7: Enhancing the Practice of Meaningful Check-ins



### Facilitator Preparation & Notes

*This segment is meant to help you and your staff enhance your current practice of conducting regular and ongoing check-ins with every woman, man, and young person using your center services.*

*Please note: If your center does **NOT currently** engage in a formal check-in process with EVERY woman, man, and young person using center services please ensure that you have completed Module 4, Segments 1-6 prior to completing this segment. This segment can help deepen your approach and enhance your practice. We will explore how you are setting the stage for a check-in practice that reflects the values of your organization while centering the humanity of all the participants in your program. We recommend you read through each step and modify the process as needed according to your existing center practices.*

*In this segment, you will be establishing smaller workgroups to revisit or develop your practice related to check-ins. Workgroups can be a very effective way for staff to engage in the program development, advance new skills, or use and share the skills they already possess. Here are some tips on supporting the workgroup concept in your program:*

- 1) Support staff to schedule workgroup time as you would a visit or other work related to families.*
- 2) Think creatively as a team about how to make it work, see if staff have suggestions about what they feel they need to add this to their workload.*
- 3) Acknowledge that staff have different and unique gifts and some may not want to do program development work - acknowledge that this is okay.*
- 4) Be willing to take something off their plate or jump in to support their participation if needed.*

*You will also need to consider a few things before you establish the workgroup. These things are:*

- *How much time can the workgroup feasibly devote to the work?*
- *How will schedules be accommodated for this extra work?*
- *Are you able to offer any incentive to people who join the workgroup?*
- *How will you set up regular check-ins between the workgroup and the whole staff so that majority consensus can be reached?*

*Important note: It is tempting for many programs to create a form for staff to complete related to check-ins. This may come up as a solution from the staff workgroup or as your staff works to re-evaluate or develop policies. We recommend that the check-in process NOT be guided by a form. This can make the process feel needlessly formal, institutional, distant, and inauthentic. Remember that check-ins should be relational and connective. If necessary, refer back to Segment 1: The Purpose of a Meaningful Check-in and reflect on the brainstorming staff discussion you held.*



### **Supporting Materials**

- A copy of your current program belief statement, mission or purpose statement, a vision, and written values or philosophy statement
- Note-taking materials



### **Facilitator Guide & Talking Points**

1. (10 minutes) Check-in: If you could change one thing in the world today, what would it be?

**NOTE:** If your organization has a current program belief, mission or purpose statement, and a written vision, values, or philosophy statement then skip to Step 3, if your program does not have these items in place continue with Step 2.

2. (3 minutes) Share: Today we are exploring how we can work to enhance our practice of regular check-ins with every member of a family that uses our services. As a way to begin our exploration, it will be helpful to undergo a foundational exploration. Our first step is to explore our definitions and beliefs about domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, dating violence, and stalking.

**Note:** Whether you have been working collaboratively for years or are just building your team, it's important not to make assumptions that everyone holds the same definitions, beliefs, and philosophies about this work.

As a large group process, pose the following questions to help you explore the beliefs that are held by your program staff:

Q- What beliefs do you have about domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child sexual abuse that inform and guide your work?

Q- What unifying/common beliefs do you possess as an OVW grant community?

Q- How should these beliefs guide and inform the development and operation of your supervised visitation program?

Your beliefs should then guide the development of a unifying vision, mission, and philosophy. Developing these will take dedicated time and attention. At the conclusion of your discussion in this step ask for 2-4 volunteers to join a workgroup to continue the development of your program's unifying vision, mission, and philosophy. If you find that you need additional assistance, please contact Inspire Action for Social Change / [info@inspireactionforsocialchange.org](mailto:info@inspireactionforsocialchange.org) for specialized assistance.

3. (10 minutes) Share: "We will be conducting a review of our current mission, vision, and philosophy statements to ensure they are aligned with our practice of check-ins. We will be looking at where we are aligned and where we might be missing the mark." Provide each person with a copy of your current program mission, vision, and philosophy statements. Ask each staff member to review these

documents. Engage the staff in a discussion using the following questions:

- a. Does our practice of conducting check-ins reflect our current mission, vision, and philosophy statements?
- b. Is there anything we need to change to be in line with these concepts? If so, what?
- c. What is one thing we can start doing right away to make us more in line with our mission, vision, and philosophy statements?
- d. Does anything surprise you?

At the conclusion of your discussion summarize the team consensus and make a concrete plan on how you will address any needed items to ensure the practice of check-ins is supported by the foundational aspects of your programming.

4. (3 minutes) Share that the next step of our exploration will look at the types of policies & procedures we have (or need to) put in place that support our practice of regular check-ins with every member of a family that uses our services. Developing policies and procedures is considerable work that requires thoughtfulness, assessment, and our collective expertise. Today we will lay the foundation for a smaller workgroup to be able to continue to develop more completely. At the end of our time together, we will be asking for 2-4 volunteers to join the workgroup. There are supplemental tools and guidance available to help the workgroup examine and develop our check-in policies, and we will work together collectively with the workgroup as they are developed. We may also eventually amend and add to existing policies and procedures more comprehensively (not just focused on check-ins), and this process will ultimately help us develop stronger policy development practices.
5. (10 minutes) Large group discussion: “When you think about our current practice or of our center developing the practice of regular check-ins, where do you think we should focus our policy and procedure examination or development efforts? At this stage, we can start with just major themes where you think we need to focus.”



Take notes on the themes that staff bring up. If necessary, you can supplement the conversation by asking about these areas of focus, but let the staff generate ideas before you offer any of these:

- a. Scheduling service with enough time built in to support check-ins
  - b. Staff schedules
  - c. Space/where check-ins will happen
  - d. Incorporating discussion of check-ins in staff meetings and consultations
  - e. Documentation
6. (3 minutes) This next step will allow the staff to practice policy examination together, help establish some group cohesion, and develop a process that feels comfortable. Share: “As a way of developing our policy development skills, now we will hone in on confidentiality specifically as it relates to the practice of check-ins. There is a lot to consider related to check-ins and confidentiality. Check-ins will help you build a strong relationship with participants, and many will become comfortable sharing personal information with you. This brings up an important point: just because the information is shared with you doesn’t mean you are responsible for documenting or doing something with that information. We should all get clear about what and how we document the information we learn in check-ins. We also want you to feel comfortable with the whole process so you can engage authentically with our participants.”
7. (5 minutes) Break the staff into groups of 2-3, and ask them to discuss: What comes up when we talk about creating policy and procedure that balances the importance of survivor safety with confidentiality for both parents and all children and youth during check-ins? Let small groups know they will be reporting back to the larger group.
8. (10 minutes) Large group discussion and report out. You or someone should take notes of the discussion, as this information could be helpful to your future workgroup.

9. (5 minutes) Ask for volunteers for a “Developing or Enhancing Check-In Policies and Procedures Workgroup.” Ideally, it will be helpful to have a workgroup of at least 2-4 people (more is fine if there’s interest). Let people know that learning how to write good policy is an excellent career-boosting skill to develop. They will first be focused on developing policy and procedure specific to check-ins, but in the future, you may assemble another workgroup, including community partners, to assess and modify all current policy as needed. Let the staff know about how much time you anticipate this workgroup will spend, and how you will make accommodations to their schedules. You should also let everyone know that the workgroup will check back in with the whole staff team once they have draft policies related to check-ins, and you will all work together until majority approval is reached. Before you end the meeting, make sure that a first meeting for the workgroup is scheduled, and a general timeline is established for the workgroup to come back to the rest of the staff.
10. Check out: Have the staff team pair up and ask each person to share one specific thing they like or appreciate about their partner and why.

## Module 4, Segment 7: Enhancing the Practice of Meaningful Check-ins

### Supplemental Guide to the Practice of Checking-in: Policy & Procedure Development Considerations

Developing or modifying policies and procedures can feel like a daunting task whether you are building a visitation program from the ground up or taking a moment to reflect on your current programming. However, what we have learned over the years is that when a program develops and revises their policies and procedures in a manner that both accounts for and engages a wide variety of stakeholders in the development and ongoing review and assessment of your programming the outcome is a program that is informed and responsive to the individuals and communities being served. **Being informed by, learning from, and engaging with** participants, staff, and community partners in examining supervised visitation practices has multiple benefits in shaping and guiding a center's work. This approach helps us guide our decisions, develop our policies and procedures, evaluate services, and continually assess the effectiveness of current practices. The think piece on [Informing the Practice of Supervised Visitation](#)<sup>5</sup> can support your work. This resource reviews six approaches to learning about the quality and impact of supervised visitation practices from participants, staff, volunteers, and community partners. The methods include questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, check-ins, case file reviews, and case consultations. As you embark on your check-in policy and procedure development or re-examination, here are a few additional steps to follow:

1. Consider **organizing each of your policies and procedures** with a statement of purpose, a clearly articulated policy, and precise procedures to support or carry out your policy.

**Purpose:** The purpose clearly and precisely outlines the reason the policy or section of policies exist. The purpose

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<sup>5</sup> Informing the Practice of Supervised Visitation written by M. Shepard, J. Sadusky, & B. McNamara can be found on the resource page of Inspire Action for Social Change's website. <http://www.inspireactionforsocialchange.org/resources>

statement should be linked to the mission of the organization, the intent and goals of the program, and be firmly grounded in the OVW Guiding Principles. Without providing a purpose statement for each section, the program can easily lose the intent and “why” you have put very specific policies and procedures in place.

**Policy:** A policy is a statement that is determined by an organization to be followed - the “what must be done.”

**Procedure:** A procedure is the instructions - the “how” to carry out a said policy.

It is important to **distinguish policies from procedures**. When developing a policy document, it is very easy to intertwine policies and procedures together. There should also be an intentional process an organization goes through when establishing or revising policies. Policies should not be changed arbitrarily – but as an organization, you can adapt procedures (that would still follow a policy) but be able to accommodate any unique circumstances that may arise.

2. **Ensure your internal staff policy and procedure document is not confused with your center participant guidelines or rules.** These are two separate and distinct documents that serve two separate and distinct purposes.
3. Internal policy and procedures that support the practice of participant check-ins must be linked and support your stated **purpose of check-ins** that you defined early on in your exploration. Refer back to your work in Module 4: Segment 1: Purpose of a Meaningful Check-in.
4. **Policy development considerations and examples\***  
**Consider: Who will conduct check-ins** with each member of the family? Some options to consider include:
  - a. Visitation monitor
  - b. Administrative staff
  - c. The person who has worked with the family the most

**Consider: What specifically will be done.** How will staff be guided and instructed to conduct check-in, what is the goal of this practice, and what purpose will check-in serve in your program.

**Consider: Where will check-ins be conducted?** Where will you instruct staff to carry out check-ins. Don't let the lack of a formalized space get in the way - a dedicated space can simply mean the hallway you use to walk children from one parent to the other or a corner of the waiting area. You want to ensure that it will be a space that you can control who comes and goes so that other center participants are not in the same space during another person's check-in process. A dedicated space shouldn't require a lot of logistics and movement of people or staff to carry out. Ideally, there would be a natural routine and flow to being able to conduct check-ins easily.

**Consider: When will check-ins occur?** What is the expectation you are setting for staff to follow and how will you account for unique needs and individual circumstances? What are your scheduling practices and how will they support the ability to conduct check-ins.

### **Examples of Policies Related to Check-ins to Aid in Your Development Process\***

*\*Note that these examples of policies and procedures collected from centers across the country. They are not intended as model policies but are provided as aids to your policy and procedure development process to support getting your conversations started. The examples provided are not meant for "cut and paste" use. Each center is unique in its challenges and opportunities, so universal policy sharing should be avoided. We recommend you do a deep dive around your center's specific policy needs as they relate to check-ins before adopting any part of these examples.*

## **Sample service delivery policies and procedures**

*The staff should be intentional about connecting with every person using the center's services. Check-in's support the ability of the staff to build relationships, ensure safety needs are being met, and understand each person's unique needs.*

*Center staff will make it a priority to check-in with each parent and child that is participating in services - these conversations may occur informally before and after visits, or by a telephone check-in between scheduled appointment. Parents will also be invited to contact the program staff to arrange for an additional face-to-face meeting if needed.*

*Waiting periods for center participants are an opportunity for the staff to offer time to connect with the staff, provide support, and identify additional needed community resources.*

*Center staff will escort each child from one parent to another. The staff will be intentional and check-in with each child and youth before and after each scheduled service.*

*Center staff will inform each parent of when they can depart from the facility to ensure the safety of the adult victim and children are accounted for, and the staff member has been able to check-in with each party or at a minimum has been able to make arrangements to check-in at a later time.*

*A check-in before and after each visit is an opportunity to provide suggestions and discuss strategies to help support the parent in building a positive relationship with their children. Issues involving interventions that took place may be addressed at the time of occurrence, but may also be discussed during the check-in time.*

### **Sample design of space policies and procedures**

*The visitation space includes a check-in room for each point of entry and is the first area accessed when moving from the waiting areas to the visitation spaces.*

### **Sample scheduling policies and procedures**

*To ensure the safety of each adult victim and child, center staff will determine the visitation plan of each scheduled appointment.*

*When establishing an individualized visitation plan for each parent, the schedule for supervised visits will support a staggered arrival and departure plan and account for the individual needs of each family. The center will follow the general guidelines of reserving two hours of staff time per family. Within those two hours the staff will build in intentional check-in time with each parent and child.*

### **Staff meetings and staff check-ins policies and procedures**

*Center staff will conduct a visit pre-briefing and an after-visit debriefing with the staff team.*

## **5. Final Check: Anticipate and avoid unintended negative consequences. When developing policies, ask the following questions of each policy:**

- How is the policy a reflection of your beliefs?
- How does the policy support your vision/mission/philosophy?
- Does this policy/procedure support the OVW Supervised Visitation Grant Program Guiding Principles?
- Who is the policy established for – who does the policy benefit?
- Why is the policy established? What is the intent of the policy?
- How does it account for the realities of all of the cultural identities of the possible participants?
- How will the policy be evaluated?
- Do the policy and the procedures account for the safety needs of survivors of domestic violence who are the visiting parent?

- Do the policy and procedures conform to any larger organizational rules, laws, or regulations?
- Do the policy and procedures anticipate how a person who uses violence might circumvent the intent of this policy or find ways to use this policy to cause further harm?
- Will you ever need to make exceptions to this policy?
- Do the policy and procedures reflect an understanding that there will be varying degrees of dangerousness and safety risks for each family?
- Is there clarity around why this policy has been established and who the policy benefits?
- Is there clarity around how this policy will be implemented?